

Scoop Essentials: Beating The Employment Odds

By Michelle Diament

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When the government released its first ever jobs report on people with disabilities earlier this month, it confirmed what was long suspected. Americans with disabilities are far more likely to be unemployed than their non-disabled peers. And, as the economy takes a nosedive, the number of people with disabilities who are jobless continues to climb.

But not to fear. There are opportunities to make money while doing something you enjoy, no matter your abilities or skill level. In this installment of Scoop Essentials, Doreen Rosimos, an employment specialist and a partner at [IncomeLinks, LLC](#), shows you how.

Check out what Doreen has to say and then click [here](#) to submit your own questions to her.

Disability Scoop: Can you talk about the current employment situation for people with disabilities?

Doreen Rosimos: It's tough to find a job right now for everybody, but I do believe it's possible. One of the things I tell people is you need to be in people's faces without agitating them. Use your connections. Use the people you know. When you go places, look for things that aren't getting done. For people with disabilities sometimes they're looking for full-time work, but most of the time they're not. To get a part-time job right now is actually much easier. So this is an opportunity for us.

Disability Scoop: What options exist for people with disabilities who are looking for work?

Doreen Rosimos: There are opportunities. Right now going to a small employer — the corner market, the local bakery, the businesses with five to six people — is the best place to get part-time employment, especially if you can go in and talk to the people there. Maybe they need someone just two hours a day. It's hard to find someone for two hours a day. But for folks with disabilities, that's often what they want because of their benefits or because they may get tired, so that's actually good news.

As far as locating a job, a lot of people get money under the community-based care waiver, which is Medicaid money. If you can direct it yourself, you can move within the guidelines of

Medicaid and it can pay for assistance to help you get a job. There are people who have literally paid a bounty to people who help them get a job. They've gone to their neighbor and said, can you help me find a job? I have \$500 on my job line or I have \$100 on my job line. It's a reward to anyone who finds me a job. That's a bargain for the country. The reality is that we pay thousands of dollars to help people find jobs.

Disability Scoop: How do you identify a job that's going to be successful for you?

Doreen Rosimos: That's a hard one for anybody. Like Confucius said, if you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life. When I help people find jobs, I don't help them find a job. I help them find a place to be, where they can grow as a person and experience some satisfaction in their life, not just put band-aids in a box. A place where they can be around people, if that's what they're looking for. I actually have a worksheet that I use with people and it asks, do you like crowds, do you like noise, do you like light, that type of thing. Then in my mind I figure out that place. I look at characteristics first, then skill.

Disability Scoop: What should you look for in an employment situation if you're a person with a disability?

Doreen Rosimos: Ask yourself, do you think that you could be successful there? That's the number one thing. One of the things that happens is that people will take anything just to get a paycheck. In reality, you could just be leading yourself to a black mark on your resume. So don't just take anything. Don't hold out for the ultimate dream job either but hold out for the brick in the sidewalk that will bring you to your ultimate dream job.

Disability Scoop: A lot of people struggle with what they want to do. What advice do you have?

Doreen Rosimos: Believe in yourself. I'll be sitting with people and they're 40 and they have a developmental disability or an intellectual disability and they're at that point where they'll do anything even if it's a job they've had nine times before and they haven't been successful. I just try to get them to relax and talk about when they were younger. What did they want to do then? Slowly they start remembering what they wanted to do.

I had a guy who just wanted to be an electrician, but he'd been electrocuted and he was never going to be an electrician again, but he wouldn't give up that dream. No matter what other job you put him in, he wouldn't even try. I talked to him and he just really missed his buddies. So I helped him get a job where the electricians hang out. He was so happy and he's probably been there eleven or twelve years now.

Disability Scoop: What if you are having finding or keeping a job?

Doreen Rosimos: This is a time when all employers are looking through their books and figuring out who's making money for them and who's not. And the ones who are not producing are going. It's really an opportunity for America's employers to clean house. And for people with disabilities, I really worry because employers may be looking and saying, "he gets a social

security check and this guy here has nothing else, so I'll keep the guy with nothing else." I think that's happening a lot.

You need to keep a positive outlook. When your employer is walking around and he sees someone without a positive outlook, suddenly that person has a blemish. People want to be around happy people right now.

Disability Scoop: Is there a job out there for everyone? Or are there some people for whom working is unfeasible?

Doreen Rosimos: I don't believe that there's a job for everyone because we don't have the power to make people hire people. That's why I tend to really go toward micro-enterprise development, or self employment, because everybody can produce income.

Finding a job can be difficult because employers often make assumptions. You can dress up a person all you want, but if an employer sees something that scares them a little bit, the employer tends to get nervous.

Disability Scoop: Can you tell me about micro-enterprises?

Doreen Rosimos: A micro-enterprise is a business that provides a service or sells a product. It's a very small business that often just employs the person who owns it. Some examples are a guy who finds scrap metal and brings it to the scrap metal yard to get money. Or the guy who sells coffee on the third floor of the insurance building. Another example is a person who takes their art and turns it into cards and sells them.

The reason we want a job usually is for income. The second reason is bringing other aspects of life into our life like people or places. Micro-enterprises do both. The person who runs it has control. They find the customers. They have control over how big their business gets and what their prices are. A micro-enterprise lets you control your own life.

Right now there are opportunities everywhere. If you know how to fix anything, if you are a person who can mend a shoe, you're going to be busy. People aren't buying new shoes, they're fixing shoes. There are lots of opportunities like that. If you're the guy selling one flower instead of a dozen, people will buy one in times like these because they can't afford a dozen.

Disability Scoop: Who is a good candidate for a micro-enterprise?

Doreen Rosimos: Anyone who wants to generate income and can't find a job or doesn't want a traditional job. A person is a good candidate if they have a medical condition and need to own their own schedule or if a person doesn't have transportation and can only work when they have a ride. It works well for people who need to set their own schedules.

Disability Scoop: How do you pick something that's right for you?

Doreen Rosimos: Figure out where you want to be, what kind of people you want to be around and what time of day you want to be there. The other thing I tell people is to think about how much you need to get the things you want. Look at what you want to do everyday. Do you want to have HBO? Do you want to go on vacation? What does it take to pay for a week of your life?

We often ask how much you want to make, but for people with developmental disabilities and especially people who've never worked, that's like reaching to the sky. But if you sit down and say, "what do you want to do everyday" and they say, "I want to go to the coffee shop everyday" or "I want to go to Disney World." Well, then you can do the math.

Disability Scoop: What are the characteristics of a micro-enterprise?

Doreen Rosimos: You have the control. It's a great feeling to be self-employed right now and that's what a micro-enterprise is. It means I'm going to make a decision about how hard I'm going to work to get a contract. Not, I'm going to wait to see how hard my boss works to get a contract. It's freedom and control.

We've got micro-enterprises where people make \$100,000 and some where people make \$30 a month. It depends what they strive for, what they aim for and did they pick the right business plan. It could be anything. I know a person who breeds birds and probably makes \$40,000 a year. And I know a guy with a three-head M&M machine in a local Laundromat. He goes to the Laundromat everyday and gets his quarters and refills the machine. He sees the same people over and over again and they're happy to see him. They say, "oh the M&M guy!" The best part of that business is that he's happy.

That's the other thing with work, it gives people an identity. They have a routine. They go out and see people. Instead of the guy with cerebral palsy, it's the M&M guy. He doesn't make a lot of money. He made \$1,300 last year. But that's okay with him. He's thrilled. He used to make \$3 a day in a workshop.

Disability Scoop: Why is income important?

Doreen Rosimos: It's about self-pride. When people don't work, they lose a piece of themselves. What you do for work always comes up within the first three minutes of meeting somebody. It feels good to have a work identity.

Disability Scoop: You mentioned someone you worked with who was previously employed in a workshop. Are workshops a good thing for people? Is there merit to them?

Doreen Rosimos: First, I want to say that really good people work in them and they care about the people there, but I don't think workshops are a good thing. I don't think that people should be warehoused and I don't call it work. What I do call it is respite for the parents, which is important. A lot of the folks that go there like going there. But when I go and see someone putting a screw in a bag and then someone putting a washer in a bag and the next person putting the next screw in the bag, it's not real. I don't like creating false lives for people.

I understand that there are limited resources and that people need to be somewhere, but I don't think that's a reason to settle for workshops. I think we can do better. I think we should say, "these are your limitations. Let's see what we can create." Not, "this is what's available." That's not easy. I don't say that lightly, but the right thing is often not the easiest thing.

Disability Scoop: If you want to create a micro-enterprise or obtain traditional employment, what do you need to remember in terms of professionalism?

Doreen Rosimos: Always look your best. Look appropriate for the job. Don't wear a suit if you want to detail cars. Be clean. Look good. Smell good. Smile. Put your hand out for a handshake. Be professional to whatever level the non-disabled person in that profession is. Work is the one place in my mind where disability doesn't matter. You're just appropriate for the job.

Disability Scoop: How can you about job etiquette?

Doreen Rosimos: Some of this is parenting. You can go to job centers or look on the Internet. You can go to the places where you want to work and see how people are dressed. There are places like the [one-stop centers](#) or go to the Social Security web site and they have resources for finding a job and then there's the department of employment security within each state. Their job is to help citizens get jobs.

Disability Scoop: What are the biggest mistakes people make work-wise?

Doreen Rosimos: Not performing the job is the biggest mistake. When you have a micro-enterprise, you take care of your customers. That's your job. And if you have a job, you have to be there on time. You need to do your work. And right now, it's all about making sure that you do all you can do. It's about treating the company's money like your own money and treating the company's image like your own image.

We all make mistakes when we're looking for work. Don't accept anything if you know you're not going to be successful at it.

Disability Scoop: What should your goal be work-wise?

Doreen Rosimos: Often if you have a disability, it's expected that you don't work. If we expect that as a society, how must a person with a disability view themselves? We have to have expectations. I either talk people down who have unrealistic expectations – like making \$10,000 a week — or I talk them up to \$100 from three cents. It depends what point you're at.

What do you want to know about the current employment situation and how to find work? Submit your questions for Doreen by clicking [here](#). Then, check back at Disability Scoop in the coming weeks for Doreen's answers.

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- *blakesma said:*

This is an excellent article and can really help some of us refine our goals when applying for jobs.

As a disabled woman, I work part time as a teacher and also part time at home. This home opportunity is wonderful for any person with a disability who finds it difficult to get a job due to transportation issues or other job related obstacles.